

## ***Hoyer, Cardin speak at breakfast honoring heritage***

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By JEFF NEWMAN

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Betty Richardson remembers when she planned the first 5th Congressional District Black History Month Celebration breakfast by herself in 1982 and a couple dozen people attended.

Thirty years later, Richardson has an entire committee to help plan for the annual breakfast, which Saturday drew about 500 community leaders to meet with one another and discuss the ongoing issues facing the black community.

"This morning, she's my boss," U.S. House Minority Whip Steny H. Hoyer said of Richardson.

Hoyer (D-Md., 5th) began the breakfast 30 years ago as an informal gathering of district residents at the Cannon House Office Building Cannon Caucus in Washington, D.C., but most of the breakfasts have since been held within his district.

Black History Month and the breakfast both began as a way to "correct the record, to counteract the untruth that black history has no place in American history," Hoyer said.

As the event got under way, committee member Deborah Stokes read a letter of greetings from President Barack Obama, who as a U.S. Senator was guest speaker at the 2006 breakfast held in Greenbelt.

Hoyer also took a few moments to promote his domestic manufacturing agenda coined "Make It in America" and defend Obama and his record on health care and the economy.

Hoyer recalled how the 2008 breakfast's keynote speaker, talk-show host Tavis Smiley, had told those in attendance that "if Barack Obama was elected president of the United States we would see the best of America. But his fear was that if Barack Obama was elected, we would then perhaps see some of the worst of America. Do I hear an amen?"

The crowd affirmed and later erupted in applause when Hoyer said, "We are making great progress" toward reversing the national economic downturn under Obama.

U.S. Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Md.) also shared a few words before breakfast, stating he was "proud" to be a member of the Congress that decreed "health care is a right, not a privilege."

"We're not going to let them take us back!" Cardin shouted in reference to Republican efforts to repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

As C-SPAN cameras broadcast the breakfast live, Hoyer stood up and clapped in time with a gospel group that performed while attendees ate and chatted.

Also performing throughout the breakfast was operatic soprano and music educator Yvette Lewis, whom Hoyer announced had been chosen as the next first vice chairwoman of the Maryland Democratic Party.

Lewis, a volunteer extraordinaire, felt like she had "skipped a few steps" en route to joining the party's leadership.

"I just love my candidates, and I love my party," she said.

After the meal, Hoyer introduced the event's guest speaker, U.S. Trade Representative Ron

Kirk, the first black person to be elected mayor of Dallas. Hoyer said Kirk should have also been elected to the U.S. Senate in 2002, but "democracy sometimes makes mistakes." Kirk served as Dallas mayor from 1995 to 2002.

Having met the night before with Obama and Valerie Jarrett, senior adviser to Obama and the breakfast's guest speaker last year, Kirk said, "What they most enjoyed was putting pressure on me for the fact that they both have already spoken here.

"The president, he was pretty proud to tell me he thought he set the bar reasonably high," Kirk said.

Past speakers at the breakfast also include U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, former Washington, D.C., mayors Anthony Williams and Marion Barry and U.S. Reps. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill., 2nd) and Elijah Cummings (D-Md., 7th).

Kirk emphasized the importance of investing in education and new technology and industries to keep pace with emerging superpowers like China and India.

He also called on African-American parents, in particular, to rear their children as they were raised and tell them to "pull up your pants, turn off the TV and put a book in your hand."

He recalled the efforts of Mohandas K. Ghandi, Nelson Mandela and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to win freedom for their peers and of his father to ensure Kirk and his generation became the first to approach social equality with whites.

"What I want you to do is conduct yourselves so you aren't the last ones through that door," was his father's message, Kirk said.